This special threat advisory is intended to provide situational awareness of threats to public order, public safety, and the security of public officials arising from violent online rhetoric opposing new and ongoing public health restrictions (Information current as of 28 January 2022, 1500hrs). The IMCIT continues to maintain visibility on emerging threats and will provide updates as required.

SPECIAL THREAT ADVISORY – UPDATE 3

FREEDOM CONVOY 2022: CONVERGING IN OTTAWA JANUARY 28/29, 2022

KEY POINTS

- As of January 28, 1500hrs, protesters have gathered at Parliament Hill. Reliable estimates on the number of convoys, vehicles and people arriving in Ottawa continue to be difficult to obtain. The Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) reported 1352 vehicles in Ontario at the time of this writing and will continue providing updates as information becomes available.

- The duration of the event in Ottawa still remains unknown. In addition to planned protests, impromptu protests will occur with little or no social media advertising beforehand. Locations such as hospitals, protected sites, media outlets and personal residences of political figures may be attractive locations for protest.

- No formal organized plot of violence has been identified, however, there are a number of factors which could impact the situation as the protest mobilizes. This could include the number of people in the crowd, potential for altercations amongst protesters and with law enforcement and the influence of ideologically motivated actors or charismatic speakers. This may impact the temperature of the crowd and the potential for violence by a lone actor or fringe group cannot be discounted as protesters flow into Ottawa. As with all large public order events, these factors may have the potential to galvanize larger portions of the protesters to violence.

CURRENT STATUS

The Freedom Convoy 2022 has started to arrive in Ottawa.[1] Additional vehicles are expected to arrive throughout the day with more convoys converging on January 29. These events are driving discussions online and receiving widespread promotion within anti-public health order networks. Frequent news of the convoy is being reported on Canadian media outlets and social media momentum including live footage of the convoy from various points in Canada continues to grow. The main GoFundMe associated with the account has exceeded seven million dollars as of 1045hrs on January 28, 2022.[2]

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SCOPE, SCALE AND ROUTES

It remains unclear how many transport trucks, passenger vehicles and individuals will arrive in Ottawa between January 28 and 29, 2022. The Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) has been providing the most current numbers to law enforcement partners as information on vehicles entering Ontario becomes available. The OPP is reporting 1352 vehicles[3] in Ontario from various convoys at this time, however reliable counts are challenging as vehicles are joining and leaving the convoys at different points along the route.[a] These include a mix of personal and commercial motor vehicles.

While discussions on social media continues to claim support from truckers in the US, there has been no information from law enforcement verifying widespread participation from US supporters. Based on social media posts, solidarity rallies in support at some US borders are being promoted.[4] Posters advertising international convoys are also circulating Canadian networks.[5] Real or aspirational international support may serve to further energize the protesters in Ottawa.

On January 29, the majority of convoys will arrive in Ottawa to meet at 1200hrs on Parliament Hill.[6] However, based on the arrival of a convoy from Kingston today, as well as the current presence of protesters, traffic disruptions will be ongoing in various areas of the National Capital Region (NCR). While definitive numbers of individuals arriving in the NCR remain fluid, it should be noted that images of support on overpasses throughout Canada and specifically within Ontario over the past few days have shown significant support cheering on the convoy. It is also important to note that attendance in Ottawa at various points will also include drivers independent of the convoy who have come from around Ontario.

INTENT ONCE IN OTTAWA

No formal organized plot of violence has been identified, however, there are a number of factors which could impact the situation as the protest mobilizes, including the number of people in the crowd, potential for altercations amongst protesters and with law enforcement and the influence of ideologically motivated actors or charismatic speakers. This may impact the temperature of the crowd and the potential for violence by a lone actor or fringe group cannot be discounted as protesters flow into Ottawa. As with all large public order events, these factors may have the potential to galvanize larger portions of the protesters to violence.

There is still limited information at this time regarding planned activities once the convoys converge in Ottawa. The leader of the People's Party of Canada (PPC) posted about events at Confederation Park on January 29 at 1500hrs as well as at Parliament Hill on January 30 at 1200hrs.[7]

Impromptu protests will occur with little or no social media advertising beforehand due to the ability to mobilize a large group of people on short notice. Suggestions to protest outside media outlets by blocking parking lots until they start "telling the truth" have circulated social media.[8] Some chatter has been identified suggesting potential protest activities at hospitals, however, no concrete plans have

[a] This includes a count from Sault Ste. Marie to Arnprior, Owen Sound, Huntsville, Kingston to Ottawa, Quebec, Cochrane and Little Current.

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been identified.[9] Protected sites, such as the Prime Minister's (PM) residence will likely be attractive locations for impromptu protests and media reporting indicates concern that protests could occur at personal residences of political figures.[10] Attempts to deliver a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to the Governor General and Senate may also be attempted, according to open source information,[11] as one of the organizing webpages involved has been promoting this MOU for months.[12]

Various traffic disruptions are expected throughout the city as the convoy converges and the potential for impromptu traffic interruptions throughout the NCR are expected for the duration of the convoy, which still remains unknown.

Heavy machinery has been identified via open source networks on some of the transports. At this time, it is unknown why this machinery is being transported to Ottawa, however, it is possible it will be used to obstruct areas. Videos circulating social media also show drivers in farming equipment such as plows and tractors joining the convoy.[13] Further, Parliamentary Protective Service advised of an online post showing a helicopter with a caption claiming it is being used to document the convoy.[14] The post also references a drone pilot embedded in the convoy. Their intended use is unknown at this time.

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Our first chopper is almost ready for take-off to document the convoy! One of our own squad will be on board, he is in constant contact with one of our drone pilots embedded in the convoy.

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The fundraiser associated with the convoy continues to receive monetary contributions and social media and news reports indicate the organizer received confirmation that GoFundMe has released the first batch of funds and is initiating their first transfer.[18] [19]

NATIONWIDE SOLIDARITY ACTIONS

Canada-wide solidarity actions continue to see increased promotion and events in several Canadian provinces will be occurring simuntaneously with the protest in Ottawa. (See IMCIT STA 2022-04 – 2022-01-27 for a list of some of the identified actions in Canada). Solidarity actions outside news media outlets[20] are being planned in addition to actions outside legislative buildings and border crossings. As the situation in Ottawa continues to receive widespread coverage, actions in Ottawa may influence impromptu events in other Canadian provinces.

GENERAL THREATS

COVID-19 public health measures and the prolonging of existing restrictions have led to increasingly violent rhetoric appearing online within anti-public health order narratives.[21] The IMCIT assesses that opposition to vaccine mandates continues to grow in intensity and could become a potential flash point for acts of violence.[22] Overall sentiment towards law enforcement remains mixed. While there is a significant amount of online chatter encouraging peaceful and lawful protest, concerns exist that protest events associated with the convoy could be exploited by individuals who engage in or promote actions that pose a risk to public and officer safety.[b]

Narratives referencing the January 6 US Capitol riot continue to be observed in relation to the event in Ottawa. Since the initial formation of the convoy, it has been observed that some protesters intend to stay until public health restrictions and mandates are removed. Other rhetoric indicating a desire to stay until the PM is out of isolation has also been identified. Ideologically motivated individuals who have promoted controversial views will be present at the protest in Ottawa.[c] Symbolism associated with anti-government and conspiratorial grievances have been reported as being part of convoy vehicles within Canada,[23] in addition to symbols such as the Confederate flag[24] which, depending on the context, can be perceived as racially motivated.

Narratives opposing the convoy have also been observed, and there has been an uptick in chatter calling out specific individuals with historical ties to anti-government, racially motivated and ethno-nationalist grievances which has resulted in further polarization between convoy supporters and opponents online. At this time however, no counter-actions have been identified.

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[b] It is important to note that there are a range of people with varying views participating in the convoy and Ottawa protest, ranging from those who have experienced hardships due to COVID-19 to those who are ideologically motivated and see the convoy as an opportunity to further their narratives to a wier audience. Not all individuals support extreme activities and there is a diversity of views regarding the use of violence.

[c] The presence of ideologically motivated individuals does not necessarily mean ideologically motivated criminality or ideologically motivated violence will occur.

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The IMCIT is liaising with law enforcement partners to maintain visibility on this event and other events related to the opposition of trucker mandates which are occurring nationally, and will provide updates as required.

Issued by: Ideologically Motivated Criminal Intelligence Team (IMCIT)
Approved by: Director, Directorate of Strategic Intelligence, Federal Policing National Intelligence

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[1] https://ottawacitizen.com/news/local-news/truck-convoy-updates-truckers-begin-arriving-in-ottawa
[2] https://www.gofundme.com/f/taking-back-our-freedom-convoy-2022
[3] OPP - 2022-01-28 - HENDON SITREP 026-2022 FREEDOM CONVOY 2022
[4] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JET211fWWuc
[5] https://www.facebook.com/groups/310624427062402/posts/498499178274925/
[6] Ibid.
[7] https://twitter.com/MaximeBernier/status/1486754020899405833
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[20] https://twitter.com/quantheoutlaw/status/1487113532558745600
[21] IMCIT STA 2022-01 – 2022-01-18
[22] IMCIT NTL #2021-07 -- 2021-12-23
[23] https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/freedom-convoy-truckers-1.6329870
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